

The Jewish Problem and Its Divine Solution

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An Exposition of Chapters 9-10-11 of the Roman Epistle



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The Epistle to the Romans, although begun as a personal letter, was undoubtedly intended by the writer to serve as a systematic presentation of the Gospel which he preached and of which he speaks as "the Good News of God" (1:1, Greek). This Gospel was not something altogether new. It did not represent a complete break with the past, but was rather the fulfillment and outgrowth of that which was deeply rooted in history. And this history was the history of a particular nation. Almost the first assertion of the Epistle is to the effect that the Gospel had been promised of God "through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures," and furthermore that its subject-matter was God's Son, "Who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh" (1:3). Thus the Gospel was definitely and inseparably related to the nation of Israel. For the Scriptures referred to are Jewish writings; the prophets were Jewish prophets; and David was a Jewish king. The Apostle makes no attempt to evade these facts. The Gospel which he proclaimed, the true Gospel, arose out of the people of Israel; even as Christ Himself had once said, "Salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22).

Now, from one standpoint at least, this was not something unknown to the Jewish people. Every intelligent Israelite found in his Scriptures the Good News of a coming Messiah. But the point of contention in the days of Paul was whether this promised Messiah had come or not. Was Jesus of Nazareth the Christ? Paul and the other Apostles, themselves Jews, affirmed that He was. The great body of the Jewish nation officially denied it. Out of this disagreement arose the bitter Jewish antagonism against them who preached Jesus as the Christ, and especially against the Apostle Paul. On their side the Jews had an argument which seemed quite formidable. Unquestionably the nation of Israel occupied a prominent place in the Messianic prophecy of the Old Testament Scriptures. According to the prophets, under the reign of God's Messiah Israel was to be saved and greatly blessed; her oppressors would cease; she would be given her rightful priority among the nations; the latter glory would be far greater than the former. Whether this salvation and priority was to be merely spiritual, and not also a literal thing, need not detain us here. The point is that the Jew could say to Paul, that in neither sense had it come to pass. And he could ask why the promised benefits had not

come to the nation if the promised Messiah had come as was claimed by the Church. Against the preaching of Jesus as the Christ, the Jew opposed the following dilemma: Either Jesus is not the promised Messiah; or, if He should be, then the promises of God to Israel have failed.

This was the problem faced by the preachers of the early Church. During the days immediately following the Day of Pentecost, this problem had not seemed very serious. In fact, it was probably not thought of at all. Three thousand Jews had been swept into the body of believers as a result of one sermon (Acts 2:41); and the days that followed saw large numbers embracing the new faith, including even a great company of the priests in Jerusalem (Acts 6:7). It seemed only a matter of time until the whole nation would repent and believe. The last days of the age seemed at hand. The Day of the Lord was felt to be near (Acts 2:16-21). Peter calls upon his nation to repent, declaring that following upon their repentance the Christ will be sent from heaven to usher in the "restoration of all things whereof God spake by the mouth of His holy prophets." The promises to Abraham and to his seed would surely be fulfilled, Peter argues, but first they must be turned every one from their iniquities (Acts 3:17-26). There is no good reason for supposing that this offer made through Peter was not bona fide, for he was the divinely appointed spokesman to "the circumcision" (Gal. 2:8). Things were moving swiftly, and it seemed as if but a short time would see all Israel within the fold, the Messiah returned, the Kingdom established in visible manifestation, and all the promises to the Jew made good. But suddenly a tide of opposition sets in. Stephen is slain. A great persecution arises, officially sponsored by the Jewish rulers. The members of the new Church are scattered. The Gospel no longer sweeps in the Jews by thousands. Swiftly the opposition grows until, among all the enemies of the Gospel, the Jewish nation becomes the bitterest. Even Paul, greatest trophy of the Gospel's power, makes little headway among them; and finally, in Antioch (Acts 13:46), he turns definitely away from them to the Gentiles, declaring that so God has commanded.

This was the situation when Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans. If, as Peter had declared, the fulfillment of their promises was conditioned upon Israel's repentance (Acts 3:19-21), the case seemed rather hopeless. Israel had not repented. On the assumption that Jesus was the true Messiah, the unbelieving Jew could ask, as he did ask, the Church to explain the problem of the nation's unbelief. The believing Israelite also would be perplexed and troubled about the same question; a fact which may help to explain why many Jews turned back from the new faith. If Jesus was the Christ, why was the chosen nation apparently outside the circle of divine favor? To the unbelieving Jew, it seemed that He could not be the Christ. To the believing Jew it seemed as if the promises of God to

Israel were about to fail. It was highly essential that this problem be given some adequate explanation. Such an explanation was necessary both to settle perplexities within the Church and also to serve as an apologetic in the preaching of the Gospel among the Jewish people. To this task Paul sets his hand in the Roman Epistle.

The first eight chapters of the Epistle scarcely mention the special problem raised by Jewish unbelief. In this doctrinal section the Jew is treated as a sinner along with the rest of the world of which he forms a part. The writer indeed talks about both "Jews and Gentiles," but only that he may conclude them all under the judgment of God (3:9 A.V.). If any Jewish priority at all is recognized, it is a priority of responsibility, which can only make more complete Jewish guilt before God. To the Jew had been entrusted "the oracles of God," but he had not believed them (3:1-3). To him had been given the written Law, but he had not kept it (2:17-29). Consequently, he is doomed along with the pagan world, for "not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law shall be justified;" and "as many as have sinned under the Law shall be judged by the Law" (2:12-13). These first eight chapters of Romans are not concerned with national privileges and distinctions. They deal with certain great universal facts; namely, world sin, world guilt, and God's way of saving sinners.

However, knowing the situation, we cannot help but feel that the Apostle writes these chapters with the problem of his nation's unbelief in the background of his mind and weighing heavily upon his heart. We are not surprised therefore, when at the close of chapter eight he turns abruptly from the joyful theme of eternal salvation in Christ to the heart-breaking problem of his "kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites" (9:3-4). Three chapters are devoted to a consideration of this problem. In chapter nine the present situation of Israel is viewed from the standpoint of the Divine Sovereignty. Chapter ten regards it from the standpoint of Human Responsibility. Chapter eleven reveals the teleological aspect of the problem, the Final Purpose of God.

I. THE JEWISH PROBLEM AND DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY (Chap. 9)

1. The Problem Stated (9:1-5)

Paul begins chapter nine with a frank and fearless recognition of the problem. His kinsmen are unsaved; they have set themselves against their own Christ. But this fact, lamentable though it is, does not change the status of the nation before God. To them still belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the service of God, and the promises (9:1-4). This precisely brings us to the heart of the whole problem. If Paul had been willing to say, as some have said, that because of disobedience Israel had forfeited her favored position, and consequently now her promises and covenants are all to be transferred to the Church, there would have been no problem at all to merit any lengthy discussion. But the Apostle was too careful a student of the Old Testament Scriptures to cut the knot thus. In preaching to Jews his Gospel of a suffering, crucified, risen Messiah, Paul was constantly appealing to the predictions of

the Hebrew prophets and contending for their literal fulfillment. In Paul's hands this was used as a powerful argument for the Messiahship of Jesus. But from this standpoint the Jews also could appeal to Scripture. They could argue on the basis of Old Testament Scripture, we are God's chosen nation. And Paul does not take issue with such an appeal. On the contrary, he acknowledges at once that Israel, although rebellious and unsaved, is still the chosen nation.

This situation, although admittedly peculiar, will not seem impossible if it is remembered that individual salvation and national favor are two quite different things. Had Israel's position as the divinely chosen nation been conditioned upon the righteousness of her people as individuals, certainly this position would have been forfeited long before. The Apostle will touch upon this point later in his discussion. Here he is content to affirm the immutability of the "gifts and the calling of God" in spite of Jewish unbelief (11:29).

2. The Explanation Offered (9:6-13)

Even so, the Jew might argue that the "promises" of God were actually impotent since, on the supposition that Paul's Gospel was altogether true, the nation was frustrating their fulfillment. And so, after all, the Prophetic Word of God had been driven out of its course being made of "none effect." But this the Apostle insistently denies. The Word of God has not failed (9:6). For, the writer points out, not all of the Israelites have rejected the Gospel message. Some have believed; and these are the true Israelites upon whom God is even now fulfilling His promises. Through this believing remnant the continuity of the chosen nation is being preserved and assured (9:6-8). If the Jew objects to this view of the matter, he is to remember that such a method has been used of God from the very beginning in dealing with Israel. Never has mere physical descent constituted any man a true Israelite. "It is not the children of the flesh that are children of God" (Rom. 9:8). In the final analysis, as the Apostle points out, every favor of God in which the Jew boasted had come to his nation through God's sovereign election. Abraham himself was "called of God" out of a pagan people to be the progenitor of the chosen people. This principle of sovereign choice, to which Abraham owed his favored position, again operates in the case of his seed. Ishmael is set aside; in Isaac the chosen line is perpetuated (9:7). Again, in the family of Isaac, there is a further separation made on the basis of this same principle of sovereignty. Esau is rejected, and Jacob is chosen. And this choice is made before the children were born, before they had done anything good or bad, "that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth" (9:11).

No Jew could disregard these facts, for they were written in his own Scriptures (Gen. 25:23). Nor would he wish to challenge them, for this would mean the bringing in of every descendant of Ishmael and Esau on the same level as himself! Were they not also children of Abraham according to the flesh? The conclusion, though not formally stated here by the Apostle, must have been fairly obvious to the Jewish reader. A principle which had characterized all of God's dealings with Israel in the past must still be legitimate. At any

time, on the basis of hallowed precedent, God could make further elections within the family. For the Jew now to deny the validity of this principle of divine sovereignty would shatter every claim he had as the member of a chosen race. Since all his own pretensions hung upon the sovereign election of God, he could not consistently challenge the validity of further elections, if God should choose to make them.

3. Jewish Objections Answered (9:14-24)

Thus the very origin and history of the nation were invoked to explain and justify the present situation of Israel, and to close the mouth of the objector. The only thing left now for the unbelieving Jew was to enter a cavil against the whole principle of divine sovereignty itself. There were just two forms that such a cavil would inevitably take. Shut up to the fact of sovereign election the philosophic objector may either charge God with unrighteousness for showing partiality, or else plead that man is not therefore responsible for his evil deeds. Displaying keen insight into the working of the human mind the Apostle anticipates both these objections, and answers them in verses 14 to 24.

As to the first objection, Paul argues, it is impossible that there should be unrighteousness with God. The very suggestion is abhorrent (9:14). Against such an idea, Paul quotes the Word of God to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (9:15). At first sight this quotation seems to support the position of the objector. But the circumstances in which these words were originally uttered must be examined in order to appreciate their bearing upon the problem being discussed by the Apostle. The passage is in Exodus the 33rd chapter. While Moses was upon the Mount, the people of Israel had turned away from Jehovah, and had plunged into an orgy of idolatry. As a result the judgment of God fell, and three thousand died in one day (Exo. 32:28). All were guilty, including even the High Priest. Had strict justice taken its course, all must have perished. But sovereign Grace spares a majority of those who have sinned. It is here that the God of Israel announces Himself as One Who bestows mercy and compassion according to His own will (Exo. 33:19). And Paul, in quoting His words, undoubtedly intends to remind the Jew that if sovereignly bestowed mercy be counted as unrighteousness in God, then Jehovah was unrighteous in sparing the nation in the days of Moses. But if, as every Jew would hold, God was righteous in choosing to have mercy upon a portion of Israel back there, certainly now He can be righteous in showing mercy to a portion of Israel in the days of Paul. In fact, the two situations were not dissimilar. At the Mount all deserved judgment (as Paul has already shown earlier in the Roman Epistle), but some were chosen unto life. If any were saved in either case, it was not because they willed to be saved (for all had set their wills against God, Ex. 32:9-10), but because of God Who "hath mercy" (Rom. 9:16). The stern doctrine of verse 16 can be defended from the standpoint of human responsibility. It is not uncommon for men to overlook this, and talk as if God arbitrarily rejected men who actually willed to be

saved. As a matter of fact, if the election of God falls only upon those who "run" and "will," then there are no elect. For, as the Apostle has before declared, there is "none that seeketh after God" (3:11).

But now Paul goes on to show that if God is sovereign in the bestowal of His mercy, the same also can be said as to the infliction of His judgments. In proof of this he points to one of the most conspicuous events in the history of Israel, that is, the conflict with Pharaoh, resulting in their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt (9:17). Now the King of Egypt was not the only man of the ancient world who was a potential rebel. There were many men who probably would have acted in like fashion as Pharaoh did if they had occupied his throne when Jehovah issued the command to let His people go. "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (A.V.) wherever it is found, whether in kings or in peasants. But this particular man is chosen and "raised up" to occupy the throne of Egypt in order that against him the power of God might be made manifest. That this headstrong monarch played his part so well was not due to some inexorable decree of God imposed upon him. His heart was set against God from the beginning; over and over in Exodus we may read the ominous statement that "Pharaoh hardened his heart" (Exo. 8:15, 32). But finally, after God had endured with much longsuffering this "vessel of wrath," the divine judgment fell, and we begin to read that "Jehovah hardened Pharaoh's heart" (Exo. 11:10).

This so-called "theological problem," against which men have thundered in rebellion, is after all an example of a very ordinary psychological fact so common that we meet it every day. "Harden your heart" against the voice of your alarm clock a few mornings and you will soon cease to hear it altogether—that is, if you are a normal person. What has happened? You have carelessly initiated a psychological process which nature gradually picks up and finally carries along without any conscious effort on your part. In such a case the Bible writers, believing that our God is the source of both natural and moral laws, and not being troubled with childish fears lest some one should discover their belief in such a God, might tell you that God has "hardened" your ears, just as they affirm that He "hardened" Pharaoh's heart.

The implied argument of this section of the Roman letter could not fail to be understood by the intelligent Jews of Paul's day. As a people they had set themselves against the will of God. And for their rebellious heart God was no more responsible than He had been responsible for the rebellious heart of Pharaoh. But as self-confirmed rebels they, like the King, have been chosen to play a part in the divine drama, and they are playing it well. "So then He hath mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18). In the one case (9:15), mercy was wholly undeserved. In the other (9:17), judgment was richly merited. But in either case, God is sovereign in His ways.

At the 19th verse the Apostle takes up the second form of cavil which may be brought against the doctrine of divine sovereignty. The unbelieving Jew might say, If the sovereignty of God is absolute, why should He then find fault with me? For who withstandeth His will? If God does not approve my conduct, why

did He make me thus? If God is sovereign, then I am not responsible.

There is a subtle moral lie involved in this whole objection, but Paul will not argue the question. Instead he returns to the objector what he deserves—a rebuke, “Who art thou that repliest against God? . . . Hath not the Potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?” (9:20-21). I have no desire to soften in any respect this statement of the sovereignty of God, but the reader should bear in mind that the “clay” here, according to the writer’s argument earlier in the Epistle, is fallen, sinful humanity. A superficial interpretation has accused the Apostle of teaching that the God of the Bible, like the Mohammedan Allah, created some men righteous for heaven, and other men sinners for hell! But the very figure should have warned plainly against such a way of reading the passage. God is not here pictured as a Creator creating man; He is a Potter working with “clay”. He makes no man a sinner, but He takes the “clay” as He finds it; and the “clay” here is man as a sinner. Such an interpretation as I am suggesting is no mere conjecture for the purpose of solving a rather difficult problem. Every intelligent Jew knew that this figure of the “Potter” originated in the prophecy of Isaiah, and there the correct interpretation is unmistakably indicated. Isaiah 64:6-8 reads as follows:—

“For we are all become as one that is unclean,
And all our righteousnesses are as a polluted
garment:
And we do all fade as a leaf;
And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
And there is none that calleth upon Thy Name,
That stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee;
For Thou hast hid Thy Face from us,
And hast consumed us by means of our iniqui-
ties.
But now, O Jehovah, Thou are our Father;
We are the clay, and Thou art our Potter.”

Thus the Jew might find in his own Scriptures full confirmation of the Pauline doctrine of sinful “clay” whose only hope is in the “Potter”. And the mercy of the “Potter” is further shown by the fact that He had endured with much longsuffering vessels fitted for destruction, in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy which He Himself had prepared for glory (9:22-23). Here, it seems to me, the Apostle is scrupulously careful to vindicate God from any charge of responsibility for the sin of man. As to those vessels “fitted for destruction” He bears no responsibility (The Greek verb may be regarded as in the middle voice, i.e., they fitted themselves).* But the “vessels of mercy” God Himself has prepared before unto glory (9:23). So the whole responsibility for his present situation is left upon the shoulders of the unbelieving Jew. And if any are saved, the credit belongs to God Who has been exercising His own sovereign prerogative in calling men from among both Jews and Gentiles (9:24).

*Note: In form the verb may be either passive or middle. In such cases, the deciding factor must be doctrinal. And according to New Testament doctrine, men fit themselves for destruction. God is not responsible.

4. Scriptural Proof Given (9:25-29)

Having dealt with possible objections to his doctrine of divine sovereignty, the Apostle next proceeds to show that the Jews’ own prophets foretold the salvation of an elect remnant—a bare seed—of the nation (25-29). I am aware that some regard Paul as having here applied to Gentiles certain passages from Hosea which in their original context refer to the nation of Israel. But I do not feel this view can be justified. The strongest argument for it is the apparent connection between the last phrase of verse 24 and the first phrase of verse 25. However, it is possible to regard the introductory phrase of verse 25 as referring back to the whole central argument which has gone before in this chapter, that is, the fact of an election with Israel purely on the basis of sovereign mercy where no mercy was deserved. Upon this assumption, the two quotations from Hosea not only cease to be misinterpretations, but also are seen to be peculiarly appropriate. In Hosea’s prophecy Israel had been pictured as an adulterous wife whose conduct had caused her to be cast off from Jehovah so that she is no longer counted as the wife beloved. But, undeserving as she is, through the prophet is uttered a word of hope as to the future: They that were no longer counted the people of God, He will yet again call His people; and she shall be beloved once more, who was not beloved (9:25). Surely these are fitting words for the Apostle to quote here in connection with his doctrine of mercy working in sovereign election. And that the intended reference is to Israel, not Gentiles, is further indicated by the opening phrase of verse 27, “And Isaiah crieth concerning Israel.” The quotations from Hosea foretell of mercy to be shown Israel when none was deserved. The quotations from Isaiah add another thought, namely, that this mercy would be limited to a remnant—“If the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that shall be saved” (9:27). Thus, in the very prophets honored and exalted by the Jew, Paul found support for his doctrine of divine sovereignty working to save a “seed” from a people who had forfeited every right to the mercy of God.

5. The Conclusion Stated (9:30-33)

It only remains now for him to draw a conclusion from his foregoing argument, and in so doing he begins to turn from the divine to the human side of the problem. Leaving the elect remnant of true Israelites, he comes back to a consideration of the whole house of Israel “according to the flesh.” Comparing their situation with that of the Gentile world at the present time, he finds a rather striking paradox: Israel following hard after a law of righteousness, had not reached that law, but the Gentiles who had not followed after righteousness, had attained righteousness! (9:30-31). He has already explained this strange circumstance from the standpoint of the divine sovereignty. But there is also an adequate explanation from the standpoint of human responsibility. The Jew had sought righteousness by works instead of choosing the way of faith; he had stumbled at the Stone of stumbling, the very Rock of Israel upon whom he might have leaned for salvation. And the stumbling of the Jew

is the more inexcusable because all this had been written beforehand in his own prophetic Scriptures (9:32-33).

II. THE JEWISH PROBLEM AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY (Chap. 10)

The Apostle next proceeds in the tenth chapter to discuss more fully the Jew's responsibility for his present unsaved condition. And it is worthy of note that he neither weakens nor retracts anything he has written in the preceding chapter. He retreats not an inch. God is sovereign; as the Potter He has a right over the clay; He has mercy upon whom He will. But on the other hand, no man shall be allowed to hide himself behind the divine sovereignty and make God responsible for his unsaved condition. The ninth and tenth chapters of Romans should never be sundered in reading and study. They belong together, each presenting a distinctive aspect of a difficult problem. The ninth chapter explains why some Jews are saved. Chapter ten explains why the others are lost.

The tenth chapter begins with a prayer for Israel "that they might be saved." Evidently the writer saw nothing incongruous between prayer and the doctrine of sovereign election. Less thoughtful men have argued that if God be sovereign there is no use for man to pray, except perhaps as a merely subjective exercise. As a matter of fact, just the contrary is true. The doctrine of divine sovereignty should be an incentive to prayer, for the only kind of a God Who can answer prayer is a sovereign God. If He were not sovereign, there would have been no hope for any man; it would then indeed be altogether useless to pray for the sinner. But because God is sovereign the Apostle can offer up supplication for his kinsmen, who of all men seemed to be the most hopelessly hardened. They have a zeal for God, he testifies, but it is not according to knowledge (10:2). Being ignorant of God's righteousness, they went about seeking to establish their own righteousness, and did not subject themselves to the "righteousness of God" (10:3). This furnishes the key to the argument of the entire chapter. The righteousness of God is within reach of all, it is intended for all, but not all have submitted themselves to it. Had they submitted they would have found that Christ is "the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (10:4).

1. The Gospel Was Accessible to All (10:1-10)

In verses 5-10 Paul shows that the righteousness of the Gospel is within the reach of all men. In this respect it is in striking contrast with the righteousness of the Law. The Law indeed offered righteousness to men, but under a condition which no man had ever successfully met: he must keep all its precepts; the man that doeth the righteousness of the Law shall live thereby (5). But the Gospel brings righteousness down within reach of all men. It demands no impossible conditions. In fact, it asks no contribution whatever on the part of man (6-7). God Himself brought a Saviour into the world; and when He had given Him-

self unto death for the sin of man, God raised Him from the dead. In these things man has had no hand at all. From the Virgin Birth to the Resurrection all is the work of God. The Way of salvation is completely and forever finished. And the Word of this Way is near the Jew, in the very mouths and hearts of men (8). How near! In every synagogue the crucified Nazarene was the subject of passionate controversy. The only thing demanded by the Gospel is something that all can do: Confess Jesus as Lord (Jehovah) and believe that God raised Him from the dead. If the Jew, or any other man, will comply with this one condition, he shall be saved (9-10).

2. The Gospel was Offered to All (10:11-15)

Furthermore, the Jew cannot argue that the doctrine of divine election shuts any one out of the Kingdom of God. His own Scriptures, speaking of the Rock at Whom they had stumbled, had plainly declared that "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be put to shame" (11). Just as there was no difference between Jew and Gentile with respect to sin and condemnation, so also there is no difference between them with respect to the offer of righteousness and salvation, for "Whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved" (12-13). This quotation taken from the prophet Joel (2:32) should have been deeply significant to the intelligent Jew, for the verse from which it is taken brings together the very things taught by the Apostle in the ninth and tenth chapters of his Epistle, that is, Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility. The prophet Joel declares first that "Whosoever shall call upon the Name of Jehovah shall be delivered," and then adds that those who shall "escape" shall be "the remnant whom Jehovah doth call" (Joel 2:32).

But while insisting upon the universality of the Gospel offer, Paul does not forget that a vast number of men have not yet heard the Good News. Therefore, he takes this opportunity to press upon the believers at Rome their responsibility for reaching all such with the Gospel message. If men are to hear, preachers must be sent. To Paul the doctrine of divine sovereignty was not something which rendered human effort unnecessary. If sinners are held responsible for their sin and guilt, the Church is also responsible for reaching them with the Gospel of God.

3. The Gospel was Not Obeyed by All (10:16-21)

However, the Apostle is dealing here primarily with Jews who have heard the Gospel, and so in verse 16 he turns back specifically to them. While the Gospel was intended for all and its demands were within the reach of all, as a matter of fact, not all have hearkened to its glad tidings. This is the reason for Israel's unsaved condition. God is in no sense responsible. The proof is again brought forth from the Jew's own Scriptures. Isaiah, foreseeing the present unbelief of his nation, had written, "Lord, who hath believed our report?" Certainly it is significant that this quotation is from the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah's prophecy. The "report" to which the prophet refers was his report of a suffering Messiah, wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. It was exactly

this "report" at which the unbelieving Jew had stumbled. And his very refusal to believe the "report" was foretold in his own Scriptures.

Here the Jew might possibly object that Israel had not heard the message, but the Apostle affirms that they have heard. And he employs the language of the nineteenth Psalm to show how widespread the preaching of the Gospel had really been up to this time (10:18). Possibly some had not heard, but the foreign dwelling Jews who were in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost had undoubtedly carried the news to all parts of the then civilized world. And those who heard could not plead either that they did not know or could not understand. Actually, this Gospel had been preached to people "void of understanding" (without the advantages of Revelation), and even such had understood the message to the salvation of their souls. God was actually found by men who had not sought for Him (Rom. 10:19-20). Moses had foretold this very thing (Deut. 32:21); and Isaiah had spoken even more plainly when he predicted that men who were not seeking God would actually find Him (Isa. 65:1). So simple was the Gospel message as outlined beforehand by the Jewish prophets. The real difficulty is not that the Gospel message is something afar off, inaccessible, intended only for an elect few, and hard to be understood. The whole trouble is to be found in the Jew himself; his heart is set against God, even as the prophet has written, "All the day long did I spread out my Hands unto a **disobedient** and gainsaying people" (10:21). The unbelieving Israelites alone are responsible for their unsaved condition. God is completely vindicated with respect to the righteousness of His dealings with them.

III. THE JEWISH PROBLEM AND GOD'S FINAL PURPOSE (Chap. 11)

Only one question remains to be discussed, and it is one of supreme importance to the Jew and the Gentile. What is the present status of Israel as a nation in view of what has been said by the Apostle? Are we to understand that their unbelief has resulted in the canceling of ancient promises and privileges? Is this the end of national Israel? To use the opening words of chapter eleven, "Hath God cast off His people?" The writer has already indicated in the first part of chapter nine what his general answer to this question will be, but now he devotes a whole chapter to a consideration of it.

When he asks, "Hath God cast off His people?" Paul is not referring to a "spiritual Israel," that elect remnant of believing Jews of which he has been speaking in chapter nine. Certainly, there should be no question on this point. To read such a reference into the Apostle's words would make him speak foolishly. Undoubtedly, he is speaking of Israel as a nation. The very apparent connection between the last verse of chapter ten and the first verse of chapter eleven indicates plainly that this is the correct meaning. The people referred to in 11:1 are the "disobedient and gainsaying people" of 10:21. Individual Israelites are no longer in view. The question now concerns the

status of a nation before God. Has He cast off Israel? The answer of the Apostle is a pointblank denial: "God hath not cast off His people" (11:2). He then proceeds to show that the present rejection of the nation is not total, but only partial; and furthermore that even this partial rejection is not final, but only temporary. In support of this position, he adduces three main facts: first, there is a **present election** within the nation; second, there is to be a **future reception** of the nation back into the divine favor; and third, there will be a **final salvation**, when "All Israel shall be saved."

1. A Present Election Within Israel (11:1-10)

Paul cites himself first as an evidence that God has not cast off His people. Although a believer and an Apostle of the new faith, yet he is also "an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin (11:1). Next he appeals to the **foreknowledge** of God—"God hath not cast off His people whom He foreknew" (11:2). There is possibly here an intended reference to the many predictions of the Old Testament prophets regarding the continuity of Israel as the people of Jehovah. Of these, Jeremiah 33:23-26 may be taken as a fair example, it being an inspired prophetic answer to the very question under discussion in the Roman Epistle. "And the Word of Jehovah came to Jeremiah, saying, Considerest thou not what this people have spoken, saying, The two families which Jehovah did choose, He hath cast them off? Thus do they despise My people, that they should be no more a nation before them. Thus saith Jehovah: If My covenant of day and night stand not, if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; then I also cast away the seed of Jacob, and of David My servant, so that I will not take of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and will have mercy on them."

Finally, the Apostle refers to the situation which prevailed in the days of Elijah as an illustration of the present situation (11:2-4). To Elijah it had seemed as if his nation must be wholly cast off. They had killed the prophets of God, digged down His altars, and were seeking the life of Elijah. This prophet supposed that he alone was left of the faithful, but as a matter of fact there were seven thousand Israelites who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Likewise Paul argues, there is also now a present election (11:5)—probably considerably more than in the days of Elijah. The present situation is therefore not worse than it has been before, and the nation was certainly not cast off back there. Still further, they are to remember that this present election is according to Grace, not of works (11:6). Doubtless, the implication of the Apostle's reference to Grace here is something like this: If Grace is able to save sinners out of the nation now in Paul's day, surely the same Grace can operate in the future to restore the nation back into the favor of God.

The present situation is summed up in verses 7-10; The very thing Israel sought, that he obtained not; but the elect obtained it, and the rest were hardened. God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear. If the Jew objects to this, he is to remember that it is so written in his own Scriptures; for Paul is quoting from Isaiah and David. If the reader should wonder why

such a terrible judgment was inflicted upon the nation, let him turn back and read the 69th Psalm from which the quotation from David is taken. The Apostle quotes in his letter only that part of the Psalm which speaks of the judgment, beginning with verse 22.

"Let their table before them become a snare;
And when they are in peace, let it become a trap.

Let their eyes be darkened so they cannot see;
And make their loins continually to shake."

If we wonder what the possible occasion could be for such a stern judgment, the reason may be found in the preceding verses (20, 21).

"Reproach hath broken My heart, and I am full of heaviness:
And I looked for some to take pity, but there was none;
And for comforters, but I found none.
They gave Me also gall for My food;
And in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink."

Comment is unnecessary. It is quite evident from those verses that Paul did not choose his quotations from the Old Testament at random and for rhetorical purposes merely. This one at least was selected with remarkably keen insight. He was undoubtedly aware that every passage he might quote from the Jewish Scriptures was certain to be diligently examined in its context by the Jewish rabbis and the doctors of the Law. Therefore he quotes just enough of the 69th Psalm to send them back where their own Scriptures might accuse them of their dreadful crime against their own divine Messiah. For three years His ministry had been carried on among them; they had heard His words, and had seen His wonderful works. Yet they had set their hearts against Him, shut their ears, closed their eyes, and had finally sent Him to the Cross. Having first blinded themselves, they are now blinded still further in moral judgment. Whether we like it or not, this is the working of moral judgment. Neither do we need to come to the Bible to find it. As I have pointed out before, even what men are accustomed to call "natural law" exhibits the same way of working in the lives of those who transgress its precepts.

2. A Future Restoration for Israel (11:11-24)

In the eleventh verse Paul turns his attention definitely to the teleological aspects of the Jews' distressing situation. Summarizing the argument of verses 11-15 we may say that as a nation Israel had stumbled terribly, and she is fully responsible for her sin, but even here God has a gracious purpose which He is working out through the very disobedience of His people. By the fall of Israel salvation has come to the Gentile world. The Cross, through the mercy and wisdom of God, opened the Kingdom of God to all believers. Israel's loss became thus the gain of the world. But, the Apostle argues, if their fall has been the riches of the world, how much more will this be true when their "fullness" is come in (11:12). And if the casting away of them has resulted in the reconciliation of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life

from the dead! (11:15). It is very evident that Paul is teaching here what all the Old Testament prophets plainly declare, namely, a future restoration of national Israel back into the place of favor with God. In order to illustrate and enforce this truth he uses his famous figure of the olive tree.

Some interpreters, taking this tree in verses 16-24 as representing either Christ or the Church, find here some support for the unscriptural theory that a true Christian may lose his place in Christ. A little horticultural knowledge should be sufficient to refute such an interpretation. As every competent horticulturist knows, the grafting of a wild olive branch among the natural branches does not change the nature of the wild olive in any degree. In other words, In Paul's olive tree Jews remain Jews, and Gentiles remain Gentiles. But in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile; all such distinctions cease. It is best therefore to regard the olive tree as representing the place of favor or privilege before God. Abraham is the root, for through him and his seed the favor of God has flowed into the world. The natural branches are Jewish, because "salvation is of the Jews." But on account of unbelief certain of the natural branches were broken out, and wild Gentile branches were grafted in. This does not mean that all the Gentile branches are saved any more than that all the former Jewish branches were saved. As a matter of fact, they were not saved, or they would not have been broken out. But it does mean that during the present age the Gentile is enjoying a place of favor which properly belongs to the Jew. The chief point of the illustration is this: If God spared not the natural branches when they failed to live up to the responsibility of their favored position, neither will He spare the wild branches if they fail to take advantage of the favor shown them. Therefore, it does not behoove the Gentiles to be "high-minded" or to glory over the natural branches, for God is fully able to graft the Jew back into the tree of favor. After all, this place belongs properly to the Jew. The tree is "their own" (11:24).

3. A Final Salvation of Israel (11:25-32)

More than that, the day is coming when God will do this very thing. It is indeed a great mystery of which the Apostle speaks, but the Gentile Christians should not remain in ignorance of it lest they become wise in their own conceits. The fact of the matter is that a hardening in part has befallen Israel; but this situation is only temporary until the "fulness of the Gentiles" be come in. Then "all Israel shall be saved," even as it has been written (11:25-26).

By this phrase, "the fulness of the Gentiles," Paul evidently refers to the present age during which God is visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His Name (Acts 15:14). How long this age will continue is not revealed, but our Lord Himself has indicated certain events which are contemporaneous with it, and others which will follow upon its close. Predicting the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. under the Roman siege, He says, "And they (the Jews) shall fall of the sword, and shall be led captive into all the nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles

until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). The end of these "times" shall be marked by certain cosmic disturbances and great distress upon earth. Then the Son of Man shall appear coming from heaven in power and great glory. When these things begin to come to pass, Israel is to look up, for her redemption is near (Lk. 21:24-28). There is a striking similarity between the events of this passage and the events outlined by Paul in the eleventh chapter of Romans. In each passage there is indicated a period of time designated as the "fulness" or "times" of the Gentiles. During this period of time Israel is in the background out of the divine favor. At its close there is to be a "redemption" or "salvation" for the nation. Furthermore, according to the passage from Luke the close of Gentile time and the salvation of Israel will be coincident with the second coming of Christ. In the Roman Epistle Paul seems to indicate the same thing when he connects the salvation of Israel with the appearance of the "Deliverer" Who shall come "out of Zion" for the purpose of "turning away ungodliness from Jacob" (11:26).

The coming of the Messiah in power and glory to save Israel was a common theme with the Old Testament prophets. Every Jew was acquainted with it and confidently expected it. In fact it was this very expectation that in part caused the Jew to stumble at the claims made by Paul on behalf of Jesus as the Christ. If the Messiah was come, why was not Israel saved? It is here that the "mystery" appears of which the Apostle has spoken. The Old Testament had indeed pictured the Messiah in two distinct roles; as a Man of sorrows dying for the sins of His people; and as a glorious King reigning over His people on the throne of David in Jerusalem. But the Old Testament prophets did not reveal the fact that there would be two coming of the Messiah, with a great space of time intervening during which Israel would be set aside and the Gentiles would hold the place of favor. This was a "mystery" which not even the Old Testament prophets themselves had fully understood. The time element of their own Messianic predictions had puzzled them. They had, as Peter declares, "sought and searched diligently . . . what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and, the glories that should follow" (I Pet. 1:11). But their search was unavailing.

It was left for the unfolding of prophecy in its actual fulfillment to reveal that which had so perplexed them. But the very nature of the case, this "mystery" could not well be revealed before. Following the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ, only one thing was needed to bring Him back from heaven to usher in the glorious age for Israel, and also for the whole world. That one necessary thing was stated by Peter in his sermon to Israelites recorded in Acts, the third chapter: Israel must repent and be converted. Now, that Israel would refuse this second offer of the Messiah was certainly not unknown to God, and therefore the present Gentile age had always been assured from the divine standpoint. But we should not forget that from the human standpoint this age was

something contingent. Had the nation of Israel accepted the divine offer made through Peter, there would have been no special Gentile age. For this cause, it was not fully revealed until Israel's rejection of the Gospel actually took place as recorded in the Book of Acts.

This view, to me, explains much contained in this Book which otherwise must remain a mystery. Actually, during most of the period covered by the Acts, two messages were being proclaimed; the Gospel of the Grace of God, and the message concerning the Kingdom (compare Acts 20:24-25). The miracles of this period were intended primarily to authenticate the Kingdom message to Jews, who had a right to expect "signs." This may help to explain why great public miracles seem suddenly to cease as we pass beyond the period. It may also explain why in our Lord's prophetic discourse there seems to be an apparent confusion between the predictions referring to the destruction of Jerusalem and those referring to the Coming of Christ at the end of the age. The age might actually have closed when Jerusalem was destroyed if Israel as a nation had turned to God and had accepted the Gospel offer. At least, so it seems to me.

But Israel did not repent. As soon as this becomes apparent the "mystery" swings into view, revealed by the Pauline letters. There is to be a Gentile age during which God will take from all nations, including even Israel, a people for His Name. The nucleus of this people will be the Church formed by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. While God is gathering out this people, Israel as a nation is set aside, though the Gospel is still offered to all as individuals. When the Gentile age has run its full course and the "Body" is complete, the Messiah will return from His Throne in the heavens, the natural branches shall be grafted back into the tree of favor, the Kingdom visibly and universally established on earth, and "all Israel shall be saved." Such, in brief, is the plan of God regarding Israel.

The Apostle now begins in verse 28 to sum up the situation in accordance with main points of his foregoing argument. At the present time the Israelites are enemies for the Gentiles' sake; but as touching the election they are beloved for the fathers' sake. The gifts and the calling of God are not to be canceled. And we must be careful to note that here the "election" is not of individuals within the nation, but of the nation itself. Israel is still the elect nation, though at the present time she is an enemy of the Gospel. Through all this the Apostle finds running a sublime purpose: As the Gentiles in time past were disobedient to God, but now have obtained mercy through Israel's disobedience; even so Israel has fallen into disobedience that by the mercy shown to Gentiles she also herself might obtain mercy. For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, not that He might destroy men, but that He might have mercy upon all.

I shall now try to sum up the entire argument of the Apostle in these three chapters:

CHAPTER 9—It is true that Israel as a nation has not received the Gospel, but this does not mean that

the Word of God has failed. Some Israelites have believed, and these are the elect remnant foretold in the Old Testament. CHAPTER 10—If the nation is set aside, it is through no fault of God's. The Gospel is accessible and intended for all. The nation is rejected only because it has rejected the Gospel. CHAPTER 11—But this rejection of Israel as a nation, though richly deserved, is only temporary. Through it all God is working out a wise and gracious plan. By Israel's temporary rejection salvation is brought to the Gentiles. More than this, Israel as a nation is again to be received into favor. And this final reception will bring even greater blessing to the world than was brought by their rejection. In the meantime God, having shut up all unto disobedience is able to have mercy upon all.

If we have followed the Apostle sympathetically and carefully through the intricate, yet unerring, argument of these chapters, we shall find ourselves joining with him in his final magnificent ascription of praise to "the only wise God," into Whose eternal purposes we have been permitted to enter.

"O the depth of the riches
Both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments,
And His ways past tracing out!
For who hath known the mind of the Lord?
Or who hath been His counselor?
Or who hath first given to Him,
And it shall be recompensed unto him again?
For of Him,
And through Him,
And unto Him,
Are all things.

To Whom be the glory forever.
Amen."

Note: All Biblical quotations, except where otherwise indicated, are taken from the American Standard Revised Version.

This study on Romans written by our Dr. McClain represents a portion of the work he did when he obtained his masters degree. This is a splendid piece of work and we are going to publish it in booklet form very soon. On account of paper shortage and a depleted tract fund, we shall publish only a very few at this time. They will be much in demand and we suggest you place your order now if you want any of these booklets.

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